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ABSTRACT

Factors are examined which should be considered in the development of academic advising systems that contribute to institutional holding power. The report first presents seven axioms, developed through an analysis of related literature, which are vital to the advisement process and then provides a bibliography of the materials surveyed. Then, four of these axioms are discussed: (1) recruitment efforts must not be given higher priority than retention: (2) the outcome of academic advising depends more on the interpersonal communication skills of the faculty advisor than on his/her subject expertise: (3) the advising process must actively promote the integration of the student into the college environment: and (4) advising must be developmental in nature, taking into consideration each student's skills and objectives. Indicators of effective and deficient advising systems are then presented in the areas of the selection and retention of faculty advisors: the organization, methods, and continuous nature of effective advising: and the use of student information. The report concludes by underscoring the importance of assessing basic skills, organizing the advising process around educational objectives rather than academic disciplines, using a multi-disciplinary team of advisors to assess the needs of new students, intensive orientation programs, and a continuous advisor training program. (JP)

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# EDUCATIONAL ADVISING FOR RETENTION: APPLYING THE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT MODEL

FORUM PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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## Presentation Summary

Through a combination of factors - the rise of student consumerism, a shrinking pool of potential college entrants, student demands for personalization - educational advising is receiving new and deserved attention. Advising programs are seen as helping to improve retention and are more frequently seen as only one part of an integrated process which begins with recruitment.

An analysis of related literature, including recent research reports, yielded seven propositions which may have utility for educational administrators who wish to make optimum use of available knowledge about advising for retention. The propositons follow:

1. Retention begins with recruitment
2. Educational advisement of high quality leads to increased student retention.
3. The quality of student faculty interaction is a major contributing variable to institutional holding power.
4. The best single indication of the likelihood of persistence in college is student grades.
5. The premier goal of educational advising is a full integration of students into their campus environments.
6. Educational advising programs should be designed to provide accurate, consistent, accessible information to students concerning their progress within a specific environmental context.
7. Educational advising programs should be developmental in nature.

Implications of educational advising in community colleges was discussed, and suggestions for evaluating the effectiveness of advising programs were presented.

## ADVISING AND RETENTION

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# ADVISING FOR RETENTION:
# A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW

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of the
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## Introduction

Today Don Creamer has given us a very useful research-oriented presentation on advising for retention. It is gratifying to see an increasing number of my own hunches and observations validated about both advising and retention by the exciting and growing body of research literature on which Don has reported.

Because Propositions Two, Four and Six have been well documented and researched, I want to spend a few minutes today with the odd-numbered propositions which Don has aptly described as being more experience-based than research-based. Specifically, Propositions One, Three, Five and Seven suggest some important and practical corollaries for those of us who share a deepening concern over premature attrition of students and who believe that advising plays a significant and essential role in student retention and attrition.

Out of the corollaries we will examine in a moment is a set of operational indicators which can discriminate between advising systems which are effective and those I would characterize as deficient. I would hasten to add that not all of the positive indicators you will see are in place on my own campus, nor is our advising system free of deficiencies. Indeed, I doubt such an ideal system exists anywhere in the land. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that unless and until we begin to move in the directions suggested in today's forum that any and all other efforts to to improve retention rates and sustain or increase enrollment

will bear precious little fruit.

Following our look at these operational indicators, I will end my part of today's forum with a proposal which can help move your advising system into a position to have a more positive impact on student retention on your campus. Let's begin then by looking at practical corollaries to Don's four experience-based propositions.

## Four Propositions and Their Corollaries

### Proposition One

In Proposition One, Don Suggests that "retention begins with recruitment." I believe, however, that recruitment begins with retention and would offer the following corollary:

> Placing recruitment priorities ahead of retention priorities will provide little if any long-term solutions to a college's enrollment problems.

In college after college today, we can see a pattern in which declining enrollments have produced great if not frenzied increases in recruitment activity. Such efforts may garner a few extra students over the short run, but they will do nothing to retain the students you already have. Such well intentioned and often frenetic recruitment activity seems to me to be like the person trying to pump water from the well into a bucket with numerous holes in the bottom. In terms of today's topic, placing recruitment ahead of retention would have the person pump harder and faster and endlessly. But placing retention ahead of recruitment would have the person first plug at least a few of the holes in the bottom of the bucket.

Viewed still another way, placing recruitment priorities ahead of retention priorities violates a fundamental axiom of our free enterprise system which has direct applicability and relevance to today's topic. That axiom is that a satisfied customer is the best salesman. In our case, a satisfied and successful student is our best recruiter. In the final analysis, retention efforts are a far more cost-effective way of responding to enrollment problems than are recruitment efforts.

Proposition Three

In his third proposition, Don holds that "the quality of student faculty interaction is a major contributing variable to institutional holding power." I am increasingly convinced that the quality of interaction is the most important single retention variable, particularly among new students during their first four to six weeks in college. Check your own registration records and you may discover that at least 20 per cent of your first-term, fulltime students are gone by the end of the second week of classes. The essence of the quality issue Don has raised today is not the content of an advising system, important as that is. Rather the issue of quality surrounds the processes which characterize the advising system. An important corollary, then, of this proposition is that:

> The process of advising will affect retention outcomes more than will the content of that advising system.

The heart of the advising process is the level of interpersonal communications skill possessed and employed by the advisor. We have long known that in the classroom environment, a high

level of instructor knowledge offers no guarantee of quality instruction, teaching excellence or positive learning outcomes. It is naive to presume that things are any different in the advising environment.

Proposition Five

Proposition Five states that "the premier goal of educational advising is the full integration of students into their campus environments." This suggests a fascinating if politically volatile corollary:

> If a college's commitment to comprehensiveness in curriculum, services and organization is more rhetoric than reality, no system of advising can have a lasting and positive affect on retention rates.

Henry Ford once observed that a company's reputation is built on performance, not on promises. While most advising systems promise, implicitly or otherwise, to assist students in achieving such full integration of student and college, our actual performance in most community colleges, as measured by today's attrition rates suggest otherwise. The gulf between promise and performance remains wide. Bear in mind, too, that I am speaking of alarming attrition rates not among students who come seeking to pick up a course or two, but among our matriculated students seeking to complete a degree or program objective.

Study after study of first-year attrition among matriculated students seem to produce the same melancholy finding. These students consistently and characteristically report they learned little about, let alone became involved in, the vital programs,

support services and activities they most needed and which, ironically, are available on most campuses today including learning assistance services, career exploration, and personal and educational counseling. More important and something which can and should be integral to any advising system is an essential human factor. These victims of premature attrition frequently report they departed the college because they found no opportunity to establish a sense of personal identity or to experience even a single caring and friendly encounter with any member of the college community--faculty, administration or staff. No activity is more central in bringing about the integration of student and college than is advising. The organization of advising and the attitudes and spirit of those who carry it out tells students all they need to know about how much and in what ways a college is or is not really caring and interested in the student. For too many, the reality of the college's true commitment and sense of purpose seem pointed elsewhere than to the integration of student with the college. This is painfully true for those most in need of solid advising systems: students with developmental learning needs and those who are undecided about educational and career goals.

Proposition Seven

In his final proposition, Don contends that "educational advising systems should be developmental in nature." This suggests an obvious corollary:

> Advising systems which are not developmentally-oriented and learner-centered will exert little or no positive impact on retention rates.

This corollary exposes perhaps the most serious deficiency in most advising systems. It also holds the key to some promising approaches to advising which can materially improve a college's rate of student success which leads directly to persistence and retention.

Too often, advising begins and ends without any substantive knowledge about or assessment of either a student's basic skills level or broad educational objective. These two elements are absolutely essential to the developmental component of advising. Questions by the advisor such as "How did you do in school?" or "What do want to major in?" simply do not address the vital developmental aspect of advising.

Equally important, many advising systems are highly prescriptive and effectively remove any real responsibility for decision making from the student. Of course, if a decision imposed by an advisor proves unwise or invalid, it is the student and not the advisor who is held accountable and must bear the full consequences. Quite apart from the anachronism of <u>in loco parentis</u> permeating a highly prescriptive (and restrictive) advising system , such systems are the antithesis of learner-centered advising. There is a fundamental difference between a system in which students learn to make functional and responsible choices and a system which takes those choices out of a student's hands altogether.

Turning to a more positive note, advising systems which are both developmental and learner-centered draw on some widely known and well established concepts from the social and behavioral sciences. Our time today is much too limited to explore some of these concepts in detail, but perhaps an example or two will illustrate my point. Consider if you will Maslow's hierarchy of needs and his postulate that a person cannot meet developmental needs, including the self-actualization that occurs with learning, while there are still significant unmet deficiency needs in the person's life. Maslow's model takes on exciting and useful significance in the face of our encountering of a student deeply rooted in the deficiency need domain as a result of a dead-end job, a troubled marriage, heavy debts and a record as a high school dropout.

A more recent area of useful inquiry with much potential for both advising and retention is locus of control. We now possess promising new means for assessing the degree to which a student is internally motivated and self-directed or externally motivated and other-directed. In the first instance, the student's behavior is motivated by healthy wants and needs while the externally motivated student struggles under the neurotic tyranny of acting in accord with shoulds and oughts. Locus of control not only gives us insight into the behavior the student brings to the advising environment, it also helps us to tailor our advising approaches more effectively and efficiently.

Another dimension of advising which can work against the developmental and learner-centered model is the environment in which advising takes place. The advising environment is particularly critical for the new student who frequently lacks the skills to cope effectively with the negative aspects of either of the two environments I am about to describe.

The first of these environments is one with which many of us in this room have had our own personal experience: mass registration in the gymnasium. Surviving this mob scene environment requires guile, perserverance and a clear, certain educational objective, qualities often lacking in our students. With faculty seated at tables around the periphery of the gym, what passes as advising too often is a hard sell hustle from a few faculty preoccupied about filling their underenrolled classes and not particularly concerned with the ethics of solving that problem. Advising becomes a sham and a mockery when a faculty member says,"No, we don't offer auto mechanics, but why not enroll in my Elizabethan poetry class; it'll help you learn to read a General Motors shop manual."

The other counterproductive advising environment is in the splendid sanctity of the advisor's office. In addition to the temptation to hustle students for one's own underenrolled classes, the quality and accuracy of advising information being dispensed is highly suspect. It is the rare advisor indeed who can advise competently outside his own discipline.

In the best of advising environments, advisor competence is hard to measure. In the two environments just described, it becomes a virtual impossibility.

## Building an Effective Advising System

To bring our task of seeking to improve retention through advising to some sort of closure today, I would like to close my remarks by sharing a model framework for carrying out advising, looking at a set of specific indicators of deficient and effective advising practices and, finally, suggesting some priorities for building a more effective advising system.

The framework for carrying out advising is one which is both developmental and learner-centered and was first suggested a few years ago by Terry O'Banion. In it are five critical, sequential phases:

1. Exploration of Life Goals
2. Exploration of Career and Educational Goals
3. Selection of an Educational Program
4. Selection of Courses
5. Scheduling of Classes

Terry's model is one which not only serves the needs of students it is one which rather clearly points the way to the most cost-effective use of a combined team of instructors, counselors, and peer counseling and paraprofessional staff in working with students. While there are other good models of advising described in the literature, I am especially impressed with Terry's because of its holistic and developmental structure.

In addition to needing a framework inside of which to build your own advising program, we also need to look for specific indicators by which we can discriminate between systems which tend to be deficient in either effectiveness in meeting student needs or in cost-effectiveness or both and those systems

which are effective in both of those respects.

## Indicators of Effective and Deficient Advising

### WHO ADVISES?

**Deficient:** All faculty.

**Effective:** Carefully selected faculty.

### HOW ARE ADVISORS SELECTED AND RETAINED?

**Deficient:** The credential for advising is simply faculty status and advising is either not evaluated or evaluated on a haphazard basis.

**Effective:** Advisors are selected on the basis of demonstrated interest together with technical and interpersonal communication skill derived from an intensive and regular program of advisor training and updating. Advisors are retained on the basis of demonstrated competence and affirmative student evaluations.

### HOW IS ADVISING ORGANIZED?

**Deficient:** Advising is organized around traditional academic disciplines.

**Effective:** Advising is organized around the broad, general learning objectives of students: (1) Undecided; (2) Transfer; (3) Occupational; and (4) Developmental.

### HOW ARE STUDENTS ADVISED?

**Deficient:** Students are advised on the basis of random assignment to faculty who carry out the bulk of their advising duties on a one-to-one basis in their offices. Advising is prescriptive and few if any non-faculty resources are employed outside of the admissions and registration areas.

**Effective:** New students are advised by a multidisciplinary team of instructors, counselors, paraprofessionals and peer advisors. Counselors have primary responsibility for advising undecided students.

HOW CONTINUOUS IS ADVISING?

Deficient: Advising is a periodic event related largely or solely to classroom instructional activities and largely disappears by the end of the first week of classes.

Effective: Advising is a continuous process made possible by a year 'round Drop-In Advising Center integral to a college's program of counseling and career development resources. It is tied to both instructional and student development activities and is preceded by a student orientation program.

WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENTS IS USED?

Deficient: Little information about the student is used other than former transcripts and whatever can be gained through unsophisticated, non-standardized interviewing by the advisor.

Effective: Hard data about a students basic skills, especially reading, are gathered on all matriculated students and used by advisors trained in interpreting test data.

Setting Priorities for Better Advising

At the outset, we noted that few if any colleges can lay claim to an ideal advising system. Scarce resources, institutional inertia, tradition and our own peculiar educational folklore and mythology, inappropriately trained faculty and staff, collective bargaining agreements, administrative expediency, and organizational fear of change are but a few of the factors which make your journey and mine toward an effective advising system slow, painful and perilous. But if you share my belief that advising is a significant factor in student success and that student success is a simply inescapable prerequisite to persistence and retention, then the potential rewards are well worth the risks.

We can, however, reduce the risks and shorten the journey if we can set priorities which serve as the basis for incremental implementation of a comprehensive advising system. I would like to close by suggesting a few areas which I believe should enjoy our highest priority.

The nature of our students tells me that nothing is more critical or urgent today than the assessment of basic skills. The scope and extent of serious learning problems, including functional illiteracy, is alarmingly high and growing. Without such assessment made an integral part of advising, the open door of admissions is almost guaranteed to become the revolving door of failure and attrition for perhaps a majority of our students. Especially important is reading, a requisite skill for virtually every aspect of teaching and learning in college, from accounting to auto mechanics and from home economics to history. A final note in this area: Plan on doing your own assessment because grade transcripts are increasingly unreliable predictors of either success or persistence in college.

A second high priority is the manner in which advising is organized. Few of today's students can relate to or are interested in traditional academic disciplines as majors when they enter the community college. Yet that is the organizational model for most advising systems. If advising is to have real and lasting impact on most of our students we must organize advising around their needs and not ours. The best systems are built around the four broad learning objectives outlined a few moments ago.

A third important priority is to implement advising with a multidisciplinary team of instructors, counselors, and learning assistance specialists, all working in a common area easily and quickly accessible to newly enrolling students. Once a student has established a track record of academic success and a permanent advisor assigned, leave the decision to visit the advisor in his or her office up to the student and don't waste time and scarce resources trying to force a student to see an advisor prior to registration. Such mandatory advising systems for continuing students, however well intentioned, are silly, dehumanizing and unenforceable.

Fourth, precede advising with an intensive orientation process and provide at least minimal opportunities for students to explore their life, career and educational goals before entering into program, course and class selection.

Finally, and perhaps most important, develop a solid and continuous advisor training program which places as much emphasis on the acquisition of interpersonal communication skills as on the acquisition of specific advising information. Include as part of advisor training some form of recognition. Master advisors are one of our rarest educational resources and they are seldom given recognition or reward for their increasingly vital service to our students.

I want to especially thank Chick Dassance and the National Council on Student Development for making today's forum possible. Finally I want to thank my old and dear friend and colleague, Don Creamer, for his continuing contributions

to our profession and to my Tacoma Community College colleague, Pat Shuman, for her assistance with today's program. It has been an honor and a privilege to speak before you today.

Thank you.



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